
Texas Department of Health

The Commissioner's Report to the Board of Health

January 15-16, 2004

Hot Topics



Meat Safety Assurance Division advises slaughter plants on mad cow disease

Following the confirmation of the first case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, also known as “mad cow disease,” in the United States, the USDA has determined that non-ambulatory cattle, regardless of cause, are unfit for human food. The TDH Meat Safety Assurance Division sent a letter to all slaughter plants, including those that slaughter under custom exemption, advising them that non-ambulatory cattle may not be used for food. The letter advised custom-establishment operators that, effective immediately, they could not accept “farm killed” or “farm dressed” cattle for processing. *For more information, contact Lee Jan, D.V.M., Director, Meat Safety Assurance Division, at (512) 719-0205 or e-mail lee.jan@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Until FDA ban takes effect, TDH requiring warning on all dietary ephedra products

A federal ban announced Dec. 30 on the sale of consumer products containing ephedra (ephedrine, pseudoephedrine, etc.), with the exception of over-the-counter asthma medications, is to take effect in March. The Food and Drug Administration has determined that these products are unsafe, based upon a review of thousands of Adverse Event Reports and a number of deaths attributed to the products. Public comments will be accepted until the date the ban is to be implemented. Current TDH rules require a specific warning statement on all dietary supplements containing ephedra, along with the MedWatch toll-free telephone number. Numerous Texas and out-of-state manufacturers and distributors of these products in Texas have decided not to sell into Texas, have corrected labeling to include the requisite information, or have had their products placed under State Detention after ignoring several written warnings from TDH. *For more information, contact Dan Sowards, Director, Manufactured Foods Division, and Acting Director, Drugs and Medical Devices Division, at (512) 719-0243 or e-mail dan.sowards@tdh.state.tx.us.*



HRSA lifts restrictions from \$33.3 million hospital-preparedness grant

TDH was notified in November that all conditions and restrictions on the initial \$33.3 million grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration for hospital preparedness had been removed; the formal Notice of Grant Award reflecting the removal of the restriction was received on Jan. 9. Until a work plan is submitted to and approved by HRSA, restrictions remain on the \$1.8 million special one-time funding going to Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio. Of the total \$35.1 million grant, \$28.25 million is being distributed to hospitals—including \$600,000 each for Dallas, Houston and San Antonio—and \$4.23 million will fund focused projects. The contracts for the distribution of the funds to the Hospital Planning Groups will be issued this month, and

funds should begin to flow by March 1. The work plan for the special funding for the three cities is due to HRSA on Jan. 31. As soon as approval and release of these funds is received from HRSA, they will be distributed to the cities according to the city's work plan. *For more information, contact Ron Hilliard, Bioterrorism Hospital Preparedness Program, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6790, or e-mail ron.hilliard@tdh.state.tx.us.*



New stores of flu vaccine arriving

Just after Christmas, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention sent TDH 20,000 doses of the thimerosal-free pediatric Fluzone vaccine, the stores of which had been completely depleted, along with stores of the Fluzone vaccine that contains thimerosal. TDH expects to receive 30,000 doses this month of Fluvirin, a vaccine for those 4 and older, and staff have been working closely with regional and local health departments on distribution issues. Although the CDC has negotiated a contract with the manufacturer for FluMist, a live attenuated vaccine, and has made it available to public health departments for purchase, TDH does not have plans at this time to purchase this vaccine. *For more information, contact Jack Sims, Immunization Division, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6215, or e-mail jack.sims@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Coyotes, gray foxes scanning the skies for January anti-rabies bait drops

The Oral Rabies Vaccination Program is once again spending the month of January implementing the annual oral-rabies-vaccination bait drop to control two variants of terrestrial rabies. This is a labor-intensive undertaking involving TDH as the lead agency with the Texas National Guard and Texas Cooperative Extension/Wildlife Services as partners. More than a dozen flights from the Zapata County Airport took off Jan. 6-13, dropping 700,000 fishmeal baits over 14 counties; these were intended for coyotes. Gray foxes in 35 West Texas counties will be targeted next; they're due to be tossed 2 million dogfood baits, each containing molasses and flavored with vanilla. Flights will depart from Junction Jan. 15-20 and will depart from Fort Stockton Jan. 22-30, weather permitting. The bait drops are effective. Coyote-bait drops began in 1995; the state had 122 cases of the specifically canine-variant rabies in 1994 but has had none since 2000, except for a solitary case in 2001. The gray fox-bait drops began in 1996; the state had 244 cases of gray fox-variant rabies in 1995, and just 61 cases in 2003 (January through October). *For more information, contact Tom Sidwa, Zoonosis Control Division, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-3306, or e-mail tom.sidwa@tdh.state.tx.us.*



35 applications received for 2004 FQHC Incubator Program

Thirty-five applications have been received in response to the second Request for Proposal for the Federally Qualified Health Center Incubator Program for fiscal year 2004, which was posted on the Electronic State Business Daily on Nov. 26. About \$1.45 million is available this round. Applications were due Dec. 19. Twelve of the 35 applicants are current grantees ready to move to other components of the Incubator program. Awards will be determined during the last week of January for a contract period starting March 1. The applicant conference was held Dec. 8 in Austin; questions from it were posted to the TDH website and to the Electronic State Business Daily in mid-December, as were written questions that had been received. *For more information, contact Connie Berry, Texas Primary Care Office, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-2172, or e-mail connie.berry@tdh.state.tx.us.*



TDH requesting expansion of WIC EBT beyond pilot

On Dec. 18, TDH staff briefed legislative staff on TDH's request to the Legislative Budget Board to expand the WIC Electronic Benefits Transfer program beyond its pilot phase. Meeting with LBB staff and officials from the Governor's Office, Lieutenant Governor's Office, Speaker's Office, Senate Finance Committee, and the House Appropriations Committee, TDH specifically asked for permission to expend federal funds for the development of software integration for grocery-store EBT systems and to provide \$200 per lane for smart-card terminals. The information had been previously provided to State Quality Assurance Team staff, including representatives of the State Auditor's Office and the LBB, on Dec. 3. The request is embedded in a Project Development Plan update submitted to the LBB for approval. Supporting integration software development and smart-card terminals for grocers have been approved and recommended by the State EBT Task Force and by the USDA, which oversees WIC. TDH is awaiting LBB permission to proceed with the plan. *For more information, contact Mike Montgomery, Chief, Bureau of Nutrition Services, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-3408, or e-mail mike.montgomery@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Disease Outbreaks/Investigations



Nation's first outbreak of typhoid fever since 1990 hits Texas

During September 2003, six cases of typhoid fever with almost indistinguishable pulsed-field-gel-electrophoresis patterns occurred in Texas; none involved international travel. Three of the six cases occurred in the greater Houston area. The TDH Region 6/5S Epidemiology Program helped the TDH Division of Infectious Disease, Epidemiology, and Surveillance to investigate the event. Drs. Huai Lin and Jasleen Mishra of Region 6/5S Epidemiology participated in the field investigation and helped to collect blood and stool specimens. Dr. Lin also participated in the case-control study, which concluded that this outbreak of typhoid fever was the nation's first since 1990 and was linked to the consumption of raw oysters. *For more information, contact Huai Lin, Region 6/5S Epidemiology Program, at (713) 767-3232 or e-mail huai.lin@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Pertussis deaths still being investigated

PHR 9/10 and the El Paso City-County Health and Environmental District are continuing to investigate the Nov. 26 pertussis deaths of twin infants. Those in close contact with the babies have been identified and treated, and Mexican health authorities have been notified because members of the family have travelled to and reside in Juarez. *For more information, contact Rita Espinoza, Immunization Division, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6634, or e-mail rita.espinoza@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Flu widespread across 9 of state's 11 public health regions

The flu activity level in Texas for the week of Jan. 4-10, 2004, was widespread, meaning increased flu activity (influenza-like illness or positive lab result) was in at least half of the state's public health regions. Despite an overall sense that flu activity is decreasing in the state, its current levels still meet the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

definition of “widespread.” Flu activity has been identified in nine of the state’s 11 public health regions during this reporting week (PHRs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 11). Influenza A H3 and Influenza B are circulating in the state. TDH has yet to identify the Flu B strain in circulation and would welcome additional cultures. Flu B has been reported from all 11 public health regions in Texas. *For more information, contact Neil Pascoe, Infectious Disease, Epidemiology, and Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail neil.pascoe@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Region 6/5S responds to flu-like illness

During early October 2003, an increased activity in flu-like illness was observed in southeast Texas. Region 6/5S responded with the following actions: conducting active surveillance for counties in the region, distributing electronic flu reports/activities each week to all regional partners, providing flu-culture kits in Walker and Waller counties to identify pockets of outbreaks, and vaccinating at-risk individuals and regional staff. *For more information, contact Huai Lin, Region 6/5S Epidemiology Program, at (713) 767-3232 or e-mail huai.lin@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Trainings/Conferences/Meetings



Trainings in crisis communication held, planned

Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication training was conducted at Region 6/5S in Houston on Dec. 4-5 and at Region 8 in San Antonio on Jan. 8-9. Participants included local health authorities, public information officers, spokespersons, and other administrative staff who will be tasked with speaking to the public during emergency situations. The class is designed to help in the planning and preparation of crisis-communication materials and tools. It also included an opportunity for spokespersons to train in an experiential “face the media” video activity. Training plans are as follows:

- Jan. 26-27 – PHR 7, Killeen, Central Texas Workforce Center
- Feb. 19-20 – PHR 11, Hidalgo County Health Department
- Feb. 23-24 – PHR 11, Corpus Christi Health Department
- March 4-5 – PHR 2/3, Arlington, Texas Department of Health Regional Office
- March 23-24 – PHR 11, Laredo Extension Campus of the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio

For more information, contact Andrea Littlefield, External Relations, at (512) 458-7111, ext.1-2916, or e-mail andrea.littlefield@tdh.state.tx.us.



Houston BioWatch event gets after-action review

An after-action review meeting of the October 2003 BioWatch event was held in Houston on Jan. 7. During the training event, two BioWatch environmental samplers located in Houston indicated the presence of a bacterium, *Francisella tularensis*, the causative agent of tularemia and an agent of concern for bioterrorism. The after-action review included all local, regional, state, and federal partners who had originally participated. Participants included the TDH Center for Public Health Preparedness and Response, Region 6/5South, and other health, law-enforcement, emergency-management and homeland-security personnel. The meeting uncovered actions that worked well, actions that did not work as well as needed, and unmet expectations. A report will be forthcoming later this

month. For more information, contact Dennis Perrotta, State Epidemiologist, Center for Public Health Preparedness and Response, at (512) 458-7219 or e-mail dennis.perrotta@tdh.state.tx.us.



Hepatitis C topic at African-American conference

TDH staffers Gary Heseltine and Alma Thompson were guest speakers Nov. 21-22 at the fourth annual African-American Family Support Conference in Austin. Attendees included African-American families, advocacy groups, and health educators. Dr. Heseltine gave an overview of the hepatitis, and Ms. Thompson spoke about the Hepatitis C Initiative's public health outreach efforts and TDH's hepatitis C-related educational resources. Infectious Disease, Epidemiology, and Surveillance Division (IDEAS) staff also exhibited a booth at the conference and promoted awareness of hepatitis C and resistance to antibiotics, as well as other infectious-disease information.

For more information, contact Gary Heseltine, Infectious Disease, Epidemiology, and Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail gary.heseltine@tdh.state.tx.us.



Symposium on birth defects planned for April

On April 8, a Birth Defects Symposium will be held in San Antonio on birth-defects data and research. Presentations will include the most recent findings from the Texas Neural Tube Defects Project and a look at risk factors associated with oral clefts in Texas. A scientific poster session spotlighting student work in birth-defect epidemiology and research will also be featured. Those encouraged to attend this free event include state and local public health professionals, clinicians, researchers from other fields, and anyone with a personal or professional interest in birth defects. For more information, contact Amy Case, Birth Defects Monitoring Division, at (512) 458-7232 or e-mail amy.case@tdh.state.tx.us.



Coordinated emergency response aim of upcoming UD-04 exercise

UD-04 is a large-scale exercise spearheaded by the U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) and will be conducted in Texas within the next few months. The ultimate goal of the exercise is to integrate local, regional, state, and federal response plans into a coordinated response to a multiple-emergency and major-disaster scenario. Texas will provide support to NORTHCOM and the U.S. Fifth Army as they conduct this comprehensive test of their homeland-security and homeland-defense systems and assess how federal and state agencies will work together in the event of major event or disaster. UD-04 training will present three scenarios: a Category V hurricane with a landfall in Aransas County, release of contaminated steam from the Comanche Peak Steam Electric Station in Glen Rose, and the detonation of a small nuclear device in Cotulla. In conjunction with the Governor's Division of Emergency Management, TDH will participate by having staff from the Center for Public Health Preparedness and Response as well as the Bureau of Radiation Control respond to the State Operations Center during the exercise. Additionally, regional personnel may also be involved by responding to their respective emergency operations centers in the affected sites across the state. For more information, contact Ron Hilliard, Bioterrorism Hospital Preparedness Program, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6790, or e-mail ron.hilliard@tdh.state.tx.us.

Administration



Regulation of Personal Emergency Response System providers being transferred

TDH has held meetings with the Texas Department of Public Safety and stakeholders to implement House Bill 28. The bill, passed during the third called session last year, transfers regulation of Personal Emergency Response System providers from the Texas Commission on Private Security to TDH. The transfer of the regulatory program becomes effective Feb. 1, when the commission is dissolved; most of its programs are being absorbed by DPS. *For more information, contact Debbie Peterson, Professional Licensing and Certification Division, at (512) 834-6628 or e-mail debbie.peterson@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Survey of Organizational Excellence results being computed

TDH participated in the UT Survey of Organizational Excellence during December. For the first time, the survey was offered exclusively online. The University of Texas is now computing the survey results. TDH should receive some preliminary data by the middle of January, with full result reports by mid-February. *For more information, contact Robin L. Scott, Associateship for Operational Support, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6114, or e-mail robin.scott@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Texas State Strategic Health Partnership staying active

The Texas State Strategic Health Partnership is moving into its second year of activity and continues to be integral to discussions of public health's core functions as the new Department of State Health Services is being formed. At the close of 2003, the partnership had activated 12 work groups whose focus is to achieve the public health improvement goals. More than 100 partner organizations continue to design and act on strategies to accomplish the goals by 2010. In October 2003, Milla Perry Jones was named as co-chair of the public/private effort's steering committee, sharing the honor with Dr. Eduardo Sanchez. Ms. Jones brings with her the business acumen needed to accentuate the linkage between public health and the business community. *For more information, contact Donna Nichols, Office of Executive Support, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6517, or e-mail donna.nichols@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Program Updates



Thousands of members of smallpox response teams getting vaccinated

Smallpox vaccinations continue in Texas with a focus on enhancing the preparedness of smallpox response teams established during Phase 1, including both public health response teams and health-care response teams. This enhanced smallpox vaccination activity will continue through March 2004. As of Dec. 31, the cumulative number of individuals vaccinated was 4,313. Of these, 1,195 are members of public health response teams, and 2,893 are members of health-care response teams. At the request of the federal government, 225 vaccinations have been given to members of various federal agencies' response teams. Smallpox vaccinations are also under way in 314 Texas hospitals. *For more information, contact Linda Chambers, Center for Public Health Preparedness and Response, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6600, or e-mail linda.chambers@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Nine of state's largest local health departments sharing data on foodborne illness

The Retail Foods Division recently obtained commitments from nine of the largest local health departments in Texas to collect and share complaint data on foodborne illness and injury. The Texas Foodborne Illness Tracking System augments existing epidemiologic surveillance through trend analysis of centralized complaint data maintained by the Bureau of Food and Drug Safety. Reports compiled from shared data will enable early identification of defective products or multi-jurisdictional foodborne illness outbreaks and will allow regulatory agencies to better coordinate investigations. Since training was completed in November, three local agencies (Dallas, Lubbock, and El Paso) have submitted data, and we are continuing to facilitate participation from the remaining six agencies (Harris County, City of Fort Worth, Tarrant County, Plano, San Antonio, and Austin). *For more information, contact John D. Lattimore, Retail Foods Division, at (512) 719-0232, ext. 469, or e-mail john.lattimore@tdh.state.tx.us.*



SAFE KIDS van makes 75,000 new friends in Chuy's Parade

On Nov. 29, the Texas State SAFE KIDS Coalition participated in the Chuy's Children Giving to Children Parade and Toy March in Austin, starting near the Capitol and proceeding down Congress Avenue. TDH's Safe Rider Program van joined the parade and received its most exposure ever. According to the Austin Police Department and event organizers, 75,000 people attended the event. The National SAFE KIDS Campaign donated the van to the Texas State SAFE KIDS coalition in January 2000. The van has traveled 66,167 miles and has participated in many activities across the state. All 50 states' SAFE KIDS coalitions received the vans, donated by General Motors, to conduct checkups and other injury-prevention activities. During 2003, the van was used for 77 activities including safety-seat checkups and fitting stations, presentations on child-passenger safety, trainings for the programs to distribute safety seats, and seven 32-hour certified Child Passenger Safety workshops. *For more information, contact April Beard, Safe Riders Traffic Safety Program, Child Wellness Division, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-2111, or e-mail april.beard@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Two combination vaccines now available, reduced paperwork achieved

The Vaccine Services Branch of the TDH Immunization Division has added two combination vaccines, Pediarix and Comvax, to the list of available products for providers to order and administer. Pediarix is a heptavalent vaccine providing protection against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, hepatitis B, and polio. Comvax is a vaccine that protects against both hepatitis B and *Haemophilus influenzae* type b. The vaccines, which providers may begin ordering this month, will be made available for children born in January 2004 and after. In other news, the Vaccine Services Branch has decreased the paperwork burden on providers enrolled in the Texas Vaccines for Children Program by discontinuing the C-5 form, "Number of Doses of Public Sector Vaccines/Toxoids/Biologicals Administered by and Distributed to Public and Private Providers" and by collapsing the previously required 12 age groups into just two: 18 years old and younger, and 19 years old and older. *For more information, contact Jack Sims, Immunization Division, Vaccine Services Branch, at (512) 458-7284 or e-mail jack.sims@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Links between TB and bioterrorism explored

The TB Education Center and the TB Elimination Division collaborated to offer two conferences on “Exploring TB/BT Linkages.” The two conferences, one held in Dallas on Dec. 3 and the other in San Antonio on Dec. 4, targeted TB program personnel, Bioterrorism program personnel, and public and private health-care providers likely to be involved in the planning of and response to bioterrorism events. *For more information, contact Charles Wallace, TB Elimination Division, at (512) 458-7447 or e-mail charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us.*



TDH study responds to concerns raised by Citizens for Environmental Justice

Texas Birth Defects Monitoring Division epidemiologists, having found that several heart defects, genitourinary defects, and fetal alcohol syndrome had a higher recorded birth prevalence in the Corpus Christi area in 1996-97, when compared to the entire state, conducted a case-control study on these birth defects in that area, focusing on residential proximity to sites of environmental concern. Although the findings were based on extremely small numbers, babies with ventricular septal heart defects were statistically more likely to live within one mile of an airfield, compared to babies with no birth defects. Similarly, babies born with one of several types of genitourinary birth defects were more likely to live within one mile of an incinerator or injection well. The findings were not explained by differences between cases and controls in maternal age, race/ethnicity, or education. Babies born with fetal alcohol syndrome initially showed a relationship with proximity to incinerators or injection wells, but not after adjustment for these same maternal factors. The other birth defects studied did not show any relationship with potential environmental sources. These results showed statistical significance, but because the findings were based on extremely small numbers, the clinical relevance of these findings is unknown. We will be updating this analysis with several additional years of data. The Citizens for Environmental Justice sent out a press release regarding this report on Dec. 29. *For more information, contact Peter Langlois, Birth Defects Monitoring Division, at (512) 458-7232 or e-mail peter.langlois@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Media campaign strives to raise awareness of STDs

The TDH STD awareness media campaign was launched in Austin, San Antonio, and Waco/Temple on Nov. 10 and in Lubbock, Amarillo, Texarkana, and Tyler/Longview on Nov. 17. A second radio spot designed to rotate with the existing radio spot is in development and will be added to the rotation. A “splash” webpage that directs viewers directly to relevant STD information has been launched and will continue to be promoted through 10- to 15-second radio “live-liners” read by on-air personalities when coming out of the radio spot. The Bureau of HIV and STD Prevention is working with regional staff to inform local health departments and contractors about the campaign and possible value-added opportunities with local stations. *For more information, contact Greg Beets, HIV/STD Health Resources Division, at (512) 490-2505 or e-mail greg.beets@tdh.state.tx.us.*



HIV Medication Advisory Committee recommends adding Fuzeon to formulary

The HIV Medication Advisory Committee of the Texas HIV Medication Program met Nov. 7 to recommend Fuzeon for addition to the HIV Medication Program’s formulary and to approve a process developed by a Medication Advisory Committee work group to approve client applications for the drug. The Medication Advisory Committee’s nomination process was outlined for committee members and the public; nominations for

openings on the committee are currently being accepted. The committee also addressed consumer comments, including some on the membership make-up of the committee. *For more information, contact Debra Seamans, HIV/STD Clinical Resources Division, at (512) 490-2505 or e-mail debra.seamans@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Texas HIV Medication Program using newly developed software

On Nov. 1, the Texas HIV Medication Program began using the “HIV 2000” software which had been in development by Information Technology staff for several years. The software is allowing more effective and efficient processing of client applications and medication orders. Refinements of the software are being continued, particularly focusing on accounting functions. *For more information, contact Debra Seamans, HIV/STD Clinical Resources Division, at (512) 490-2505 or e-mail debra.seamans@tdh.state.tx.us*



Report published on supply trends in 17 health professions

The Health Professions Resource Center in the TDH Center for Health Statistics has published a report, “Supply Trends Among Licensed Health Professions in Texas, 1980-2002,” developed in collaboration with the East Texas Area Health Education Center and the Health Education Training Centers Alliance of Texas. The report contains detailed supply information at the county level on 17 health professions in Texas, the trends in supply over the past two decades, and the relation of the supply to changes in the population. Texas data are also compared to U.S. trends information for each profession. Information on the 43-county border region is also highlighted, and comparisons are made between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. The report can be read at <http://www.tdh.state.tx.us/dpa/>. *For more information, contact Mike Gilliam, Center for Health Statistics, at (512) 458-7261 or e-mail mike.gilliam@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Nursing Workforce Data Section created

The Health Professions Resource Center in the Center for Health Statistics has formed the Nursing Workforce Data Section, created by House Bill 3126 of the 78th Texas Legislature. Staff in the new section will collect, analyze, and disseminate nursing data to be used to predict supply and demand for nursing personnel. Texas is facing a shortage of nurses; many registered nurses will be retiring just as the elderly population is increasing rapidly, causing a greater demand for health care and nursing services. Information gathered and provided by the Nursing Workforce Data Section can counteract these supply difficulties and help to ensure that adequate nursing care is available for all Texans. *For more information, contact Mike Gilliam, Center for Health Statistics, at (512) 458-7261 or e-mail mike.gilliam@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Texas Health Care Information Council in transition

The Texas Health Care Information Council (THCIC) is working with TDH and the Health and Human Services Commission to implement a transition plan wherein the hospital-discharge data-collection program and the HMO/HEDIS data-collection program are continued without disruptions that might effect any of the stakeholders. As of Jan. 1, Mike Gilliam, director of TDH’s Center for Health Statistics, began serving as the primary point of contact and supervisor for THCIC’s data-collection programs for hospital and HMO data. Updates and stakeholder notices will be posted on the THCIC

website at <http://www.thcic.state.tx.us> and on the Center for Health Statistics website at http://www.tdh.state.tx.us/dpa/A_SHDPA.HTM. THCIC will not give up its policy-making authority, powers, duties, and functions until it is absorbed as part of the new Department of State Health Services. However, it is expected that the changes occurring will enable TDH to provide THCIC programs with better operational support. Staff from HHSC, THCIC, and TDH are working hard to ensure minimal disruption. Data integrity and quality operations will continue to be priorities. *For more information, contact Mike Gilliam, Center for Health Statistics, at (512) 458-7261 or e-mail mike.gilliam@tdh.state.tx.us.*



South Texas Health Care System gets interim director

Becky Berryhill, former chief of the TDH Bureau of Licensing and Compliance and former deputy regional director in Region 4/5N, has been appointed acting director of the South Texas Health Care System, effective Dec. 15. She will serve until the position is posted and competitively filled. Ms. Berryhill began her state career in 1975 with the Department of Human Services in Corpus Christi. Since then, she has served in long-term care, emergency medical services, Texas Health Steps, Medical Transportation, and Title V quality assurance in both the central office and in the regions. With an M.P.A. from Texas State University at San Marcos, she is active in Executive Women in Texas Government, the Texas Public Employees Association, and the Retired State Employees Association. *For more information, contact Debra Stabeno, Deputy Commissioner, at (512) 458-7437 or e-mail debra.stabeno@tdh.state.tx.us.*



External Relations meeting media needs

Since the last Board of Health meeting on Dec. 5, the External Relations function in the Office of Executive Support has sent out three news releases and three “Accents on Health” to media outlets across the state. Six “Speaking of Health” radio interviews have been released, in addition to one Spanish-language radio interview. Fifty-eight requests for information from the media (ranging from the *Alice News Journal* to Univision TV and radio stations) were received and handled. Topics of media requests included abortion, the flu, rabies vaccine, mercury in lakes, and perchlorate in milk. *For more information, contact Doug McBride, Press Officer, External Relations, at (512) 458-7524 or e-mail doug.mcbride@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Regional Updates

Region 1



Rabies targeted by Oral Rabies Vaccine Program

Zoonosis staff from Region 1 are scheduled to participate in the TDH Oral Rabies Vaccine Program throughout January. Staff from Region 1 participated in the ORVP on January 6. Region 1 staff will be traveling to Junction and Fort Stockton to help distribute 730,000 vaccine/bait units over 12,000 square miles in South Texas to control the spread of “domestic dog/coyote” rabies. Additional information on schedules is available at

<http://www.tdh.state.tx.us/zoonosis/orvp/>. For more information, contact James Alexander, Zoonosis Control Program, at (806) 655-7151 or e-mail james.alexander@tdh.state.tx.us.



200 migrant kids to attend camp supported by the Progressive Farmer Foundation

Region 1 has been awarded support from the Progressive Farmer Foundation to conduct a Farm Health and Safety Day Camp for 200 migrant children in Castro, Hale, Lamb, and Floyd counties. The camp will be held in Plainview in July 2004. The Progressive Farmer Foundation provides training, a camp manual, videotapes, program materials, T-shirts, bags, banners, signs, medical insurance, and national publicity. This initiative is coordinated with a number of agencies and community groups including the Texas Migrant Council, USDA Agricultural Research, Texas Parks and Wildlife, the Area Health Education Center, the County Extension Service, and others. For more information, contact Tricia Vowels, EPSDT Program, at (806) 767-0414 or e-mail tricia.vowels@tdh.state.tx.us.



Infant born to mother with West Nile virus doing well, being tracked

In late October, a woman gave birth who had been diagnosed in August as having a case of West Nile fever. Her infection occurred at about the same stage of gestation as did an infection reported last year in a woman who gave birth to a child with a compromised central-neural system. Due to concerns for potential developmental problems in the baby, specimens of cord and placenta, as well as blood samples from the mother and newborn, were sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for analysis. The mother was positive in August for IgM antibodies and neutralizing antibodies and was also IgA-positive. The placenta and cord samples were PCR-negative, and the baby was positive only for neutralizing antibodies. The IgA results are not available at this time. The pediatrician reports that the baby was showing normal development at the age of 2 weeks, tracking normally with his eyes, gripping well, and sucking well when nursing. Additional follow-up is planned after the baby's six-week checkup. For more information, contact James Alexander, Zoonosis Control Program, at (806) 767-0496 or e-mail james.alexander@tdh.state.tx.us.

Region 6/5 South



36 18-wheelers full of fresh produce donated to Houston Food Bank

A Houston group whose board of directors includes Dianne Gertson, R.D., L.D., regional nutritionist at Region 6/5 South, donated about 1.4 million pounds of fresh produce on Dec. 10 to the Houston Food Bank. The group, the Houston Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association, was making its 17th annual gift of produce, which filled 36 18-wheelers; the group holds the Guinness World Record for having made the largest gift of produce, ever. Giving of the gift was shared by the Greater Houston Nutrition Coalition (chaired by Ms. Gertson), ABC 13 KTRK-TV, the Houston Sports Authority, the Houston Aeros, and the Houston Rockets. The Houston Food Bank distributed the fresh produce to food-pantry programs, shelters for the homeless, safe havens for the battered and abused, and

nutrition sites for children and the elderly in 18 counties. *For more information, contact Dianne Gertson, Public Health Nutrition, at (713) 767-3483 or e-mail dianne.gertson@tdh.state.tx.us.*



HIV/AIDS education provided to blacks, Asians, Hispanics

Using local media opportunities, Region 6/5S highlighted HIV and STD in December for several diverse population groups. On Dec. 1, Region 6/5S Epidemiology took part in a program for World AIDS Day at the public TV station in Houston. Dr. Jasleen Mishra moderated the program, and Dr. Celine Hanson, Region 6/5 South medical director, gave a presentation about HIV pathogenesis, the difference between HIV and AIDS, a global summary of the HIV epidemic in 2003, AIDS in blacks and Hispanics, TDH strategic plan initiatives, national prevention activities, and national guidelines for HIV/AIDS treatment. The program was a live broadcast on a cable channel, followed by a question-and-answer session. This show will be regularly re-broadcast throughout 2004. The Houston area's Southeast Asian community was targeted on Dec. 5 via Radio Sangeet by Drs. Aftab Hashim and Waseem Ahmed, who presented information on HIV and STDs in a culturally appropriate manner. Phone calls were taken from the radio audience, and resource information was provided to callers. On Dec. 10, Robert Castaneda presented information on HIV and STDs to the Spanish-speaking community by appearing with Martha Pruneda on Radio Univision on the *Martha and The Community* radio show. *For more information, contact Robert Castaneda, HIV/STD Program, at (713) 767-3421 or e-mail robert.castaneda@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Region 9/10



Activities strive to prevent flu

During December, Region 9/10 nursing and immunization staff organized school-vaccination clinics in areas most affected by the flu outbreak. Surveillance staff worked with hospitals and local health departments to enhance the use of existing vaccine stock. Community-awareness activities included presentations, press releases, and television interviews. *For more information, contact Sarana Savage, HIV/STD Health Resources, at (432) 571-4146 or e-mail sarana.save@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Regional director addresses maternal-and-child-health conference

Dr. Miguel A. Escobedo, director of Region 9/10, delivered a presentation at a plenary session during the ninth annual national Maternal and Child Health Epidemiology Conference on Dec. 10 in Phoenix. His presentation dealt with border-area health challenges for mothers and children. *For more information, contact Dr. Miguel A. Escobedo, Regional Director, at (915) 834-7680 or e-mail miguel.escobedo@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Region 11



Update on West Nile virus given in Mexico City at binational meeting

The Region 11 Zoonosis Control veterinarian presented an update of West Nile virus epidemiology and surveillance in Texas and the United States at the binational meeting of Wildlife Health Mexico-USA, held Nov. 17-19 in Mexico City and sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. *For more information, contact Dr. Laura Robinson, Zoonosis Control, at (956) 423-0130, ext. 632 or e-mail laura.robinson@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Staff participate in EPA-sponsored meeting

Region 11 recently participated in the Environmental Protection Agency-sponsored national coordinators' meeting in Matamoros for the "Border 2012 U.S. Mexico Environmental Plan." *For more information, contact Ramiro Gonzales, Office of Border Health, (956) 423-0130, ext. 637, or e-mail ramiro.gonzales@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Metropolitan Medical Response System to be developed

The City of McAllen, the Lower Rio Grande Development Council, and Region 11 received a \$600,000 contract to develop the first regional Metropolitan Medical Response System; this MMRS will also be the first to intentionally incorporate binational elements. *For more information, contact Brian R. Smith, Regional Director, at (956) 444-3202 or e-mail brian.smith@tdh.state.tx.us.*